

THE 50+ Connection

NEWS and EVENTS from the
Howard County Office on Aging and Independence

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Transitioning to an Age-Friendly Community

In 2006, the World Health Organization (WHO) developed an initiative to help communities worldwide become age-friendly places for persons of all ages. In December 2019, Howard County joined 400+ Age-Friendly communities in the US and over 800 worldwide to focus on the importance of addressing the needs of community members of all ages.

An age-friendly community works to ensure that residents have access to health care and social services provided in a respectful manner; employment and volunteer options; adequate sidewalks, bike paths and public transportation; and opportunities to gather, socialize, exercise, and enjoy intergenerational activities. To be granted Age-Friendly designation, community leaders must first develop and submit action plans to establish priorities and set goals.

Howard County will complete its multi-year Action Plan by the end of the summer and begin implementing more than 80 suggested action steps at that time. Achieving the short- and long-term goals will require input, support and engagement from individuals, organizations and groups of all sizes. Watch for ways you can become involved in Age-Friendly Howard County here in the 50+ Connection, online at www.howardcountymd.gov/agefriendly and on Facebook.

Planning and development to move Howard County's Age-Friendly initiative forward has been underway for more than 18 months, including the following recent projects that support the goal of becoming a more inclusive, age-friendly community:

The Digital Equity Initiative and New County Website. Launched in May 2021, these updates increase digital access for individuals across the county and make the county's website more user-friendly for residents to get the information they need. Communication and Information is one of the domains of an age-friendly community; residents need information that is reliable, accessible and available to individuals at all stages of life, regardless of cultural, age and ability differences.

The opening of the third phase of Blandair Regional Park. The fully-fenced playground opened last month by the Department of Recreation and Parks utilizes universal design to enable children of all ability levels to play together, while addressing cognitive, communicative, social/emotional and sensory abilities.

Funding granted for Complete Streets projects, a critical component of livable or age-friendly communities. According to the AARP Public Policy Institute, a Complete Street is safe, comfortable, and convenient for travel by automobile, foot, bicycle, and transit, regardless of age and ability. In May, the Howard County Council approved \$5.375 million in the FY22 budget for bike and pedestrian infrastructure projects to advance complete streets projects in Howard County, spearheaded by the Office of Transportation and supported by the Horizon Foundation.

Capital Funding for a new East Columbia 50+ Center. The council also approved \$5.5 million in FY22 capital funding to expand the East Columbia 50+ Center. The new 29,000+ square foot facility will provide increased opportunities for socialization, education, communication and information exchange, and intergenerational activities — all essential components of an age-friendly community.

A Message from Howard County Executive Calvin Ball



This summer is starting to look a lot more like normal, thanks in part to all of you who have worn your masks, listened to public health guidance, and gotten vaccinated. We're thrilled to have welcomed you back to our 50+ Centers, and excited that the long-awaited expansion of the East Columbia 50+ Center is fully funded in our FY22 budget.

As more of our world reopens, and we can gather together once again, let us not forget the collective anguish and grief that many of us have experienced over this past year. July is National Minority Mental Health Month, and there is no time like the present for all of us to focus on our mental health. Over 20 percent of Howard County residents report feeling nervous, anxious or on edge.

We want our residents to know that we're here to help. Our health department and our community partners have many resources and supports for anyone who is struggling or is in crisis at howardcountymd.gov/gethelp. This month, we're also pleased to welcome the opening of Sheppard Pratt's Baltimore/Washington Campus in ElkrIDGE, which will provide enhanced behavioral health services to our residents. Making more mental health services available can directly help these residents and give peace of mind to their loved ones.

This summer, as you meet up with family and friends or get out to enjoy the natural beauty that surrounds us in Howard County, remember that it's vital to ask the people important to you, "are you ok?" Mental Health is something we all can focus on, as we emerge from a year of missed celebrations, hugs, and time with those we love. Throughout the past year we've looked out for one another, and I hope that spirit of working together will continue as we put this pandemic behind us.

These projects – with more to come – will move Howard County closer to becoming an inclusive, Age-Friendly community for all to grow up in and grow older in.

East Columbia 50+ Steering Committee member Pearl Atkinson-Stewart thanked County Executive Calvin Ball and the Howard County Council for committing \$5.5 million in FY22 capital funding for construction of a new, larger facility to meet the needs of older adults in the East Columbia community. "This announcement brings tears to my eyes," she said, "Tears of joy!"



No Appointment Needed!

As of July 1, appointments will no longer be needed to visit Howard County's 50+ Centers, and capacity limits will be lifted. As in-person classes and activities resume, the Office on Aging and Independence's 50+ Center teams are also piloting some hybrid activities. To balance public facing responsibilities and the technology needs of virtual programming, virtual programs will continue to be offered Tuesdays through Thursdays in July, and Tuesdays and Thursdays in August.

The Virtual Group Exercise Package will continue as scheduled through September, but may be modified based upon participation levels and instructor availability. In-person programming across the 50+ Centers will gradually increase in the months ahead. "The entire Office on Aging and Independence team is deeply gratified by the community's positive response and feedback to our programming throughout the past 15 months," said Barbara Scher, 50+ Center Division Manager.

Scher also announced that Howard County's Virtual 50+ Programs have been selected by engAGED: The National Resource Center for Engaging Older Adults to be featured on the engAGED Social Engagement Innovations Hub, a searchable online database which will facilitate the sharing and replication of best social engagement practices. The National Resource Center is a project of the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a).



**Enrichment. Engagement.
Connection. Growth.**

It has been our privilege to come up with innovative ways to meet the needs of our older adults [during the pandemic], and to see the positive impact our efforts have had on their lives.

Barbara Scher



Cycle2Health will return to its regular schedule of three rides per week in August. Registration is now open at www.howardcountymd.gov/c2h. All level riders are welcome.

50+ CENTER JULY EVENTS

Exercise Consultations with Malarie Burgess

BAIN 50+ CENTER

Third Wednesdays • 9:00 to 11:00 a.m.

Schedule an individual consultation to establish a personalized fitness program based on the recommendations of your health care provider, your goals and fitness assessment results. Ideal for those age 50+ who have never exercised before or who have not exercised in a while. \$15 per 30-minute session.

Register at <https://bit.ly/3gbcYJJ>.

Arthritis Foundation Exercise Program

ELKRIDGE 50+ CENTER

Mondays & Wednesdays (begins July 12) • 2:00 to 3:00 p.m.

The Arthritis Foundation's low-impact physical activity program is proven to reduce pain and decrease stiffness and includes gentle range-of-motion exercises suitable for every fitness level and ability. This program is led by a trained program leader. Call for fee details or to register at 410-313-5192.

Nutrition Education: Anti-Inflammatory Eating

ELLCOTT CITY 50+ CENTER

Monday, July 19 • 12:30 p.m.

Are you suffering from a chronic condition like rheumatoid arthritis? Nutritionist Carmen Roberts, R.D., will discuss how what you eat can dramatically impact the way you feel. A proper diet can reduce symptoms associated with chronic inflammation. Free; register at 410-313-1400.



Mark Your Calendar NOW!

October 1 through November 30

The Beacon's Virtual 50+ EXPO returns this Fall, with full access to programming available online from October 1 through November 30. Potential sponsors and exhibitors can register now to participate in the 2021 EXPO at <https://www.thebeaconnewspapers.com/50expos/>. Exhibitors will be promoted on Facebook and other social media, as well as in multiple print ads and targeted e-mail blasts to more than 100,000 baby boomers and seniors. In addition to all exhibitor benefits, sponsors receive speaker opportunities, banner, print and Facebook ads, plus radio mentions, e-blasts and more!

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The Office on Aging & Independence is kicking off a **HoCo Summer Kindness Challenge** by asking the community to perform acts of kindness throughout the summer. Even small gestures can create a ripple effect — for every act of kindness you perform, another person will pay it forward by being kind. The more people to take the challenge, the kinder, safer, and more engaged Howard County will become!

Sign up at www.hocovolunteer.org to receive kindness challenges for July and August!